



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of the Auditor General
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0018
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EUGENE A. DePASQUALE
AUDITOR GENERAL

September 3, 2019

Taylor Amarel
c/o MuckRock News
DEPT MR 79243
411A Highland Ave
Somerville MA 02144-2516

Reply via email to "79243-91646000@requests.muckrock.com"

Dear Mr. Amarel:

This letter acknowledges receipt by the Department of the Auditor General of your written request for documents and/or information under the Pennsylvania Right-to-Know Law, 65 P.S. § 67.101 *et seq.* Your request for "all emails sent to, from, or copied to Auditor General Eugene DePasquale from June 1, 2019 to Present Day containing any of the following non-case-sensitive key-strings: 'Department of Human Services', 'Berks County Residential Center', 'Detention', 'Health and Human Services', 'Homeland Security', 'USCIS', 'ICE', 'Leinbach', or 'Wolf'" was received via electronic mail on August 26, 2019.

Your request is hereby **GRANTED** as to any of the above materials that exist within the possession of the Department. To the extent that any of your request includes questions for which documents or records do not exist, your request is **DENIED**.

The records responsive to your request will require a total prepayment of **\$8.10** which includes \$6.50 for copy costs and \$1.60 for shipping to your address. We accept payment in the form of a check made payable to **The Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General**. Payments must not be made to the undersigned. Failure to make payment will result in our inability to fulfill any future requests until this account has been cleared.

You have the right to appeal the denial of a Right-to-Know Law request. However, please note that, pursuant to the Office of Open Records Final Decision in *Jenkins vs. Pennsylvania Department of State*, OOR AP Dkt. No. 2009-065, "[i]t is not a denial of

access when an agency does not possess records and [there is no] legal obligation to obtain them (*see, e.g.* section 67.506 (d)(1)).”

The relevant provisions of our department’s Right-to-Know Policy are excerpted below:

Procedures to Appeal the Denial of Access to Records

- A. A person whose request for access to records has been denied in whole or in part may file an appeal of the denial. The appeal must be made in writing and must be filed within 15 business days of the mailing date of the denial or within 15 business days of a deemed denial. The appeal shall be directed to:

Open Records Appeal Officer
Department of the Auditor General
320 Finance Building
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120-0018

- B. The appeal shall include all factual and legal arguments that the requestor is relying upon in support of the requestor’s appeal and address any grounds asserted by the Open Records Officer in denying the request. Issues not raised by the requestor in the appeal shall be deemed waived. A copy of the original completed request form shall be submitted with the appeal.
- C. The Open Records Officer shall file a written reply to the requestor’s appeal within 15 business days of receipt of the appeal. The reply shall include all factual and legal arguments in support of the position of the Open Records Officer.
- D. The requestor may file a further response within 7 business days of the date of mailing of the Open Records Officer’s reply. No additional pleadings will be accepted.
- E. Except for good cause shown, no live testimony shall be received. In lieu of testimony, the parties may submit unsworn written statements to establish facts in support of their respective positions. A party who provides a false unsworn statement may be subject to penalties as provided by 18 Pa.C.S. § 4904 (pertaining to criminal penalties for providing unsworn false statements to authorities).
- F. The Appeals Officer may review records *in camera* in order to ascertain whether the denial of the record should be sustained or reversed.
- G. The Appeals Officer shall issue a written determination within 30 days of receipt of the appeal. This written determination shall be the final agency decision in the matter.

1. The following information is being furnished to you for your information only. It is not intended to constitute an offer of insurance or any other financial product.

The information contained in this document is for informational purposes only and should not be used as a basis for any investment decision.

Information to Applicants of Life Insurance Policies

A person who is applying for a life insurance policy should be aware of the following information. This information is intended to help you understand the process of applying for a life insurance policy and the factors that may affect the outcome of your application.

1. The information in this document is for informational purposes only and should not be used as a basis for any investment decision.

2. The information in this document is for informational purposes only and should not be used as a basis for any investment decision.

3. The information in this document is for informational purposes only and should not be used as a basis for any investment decision.

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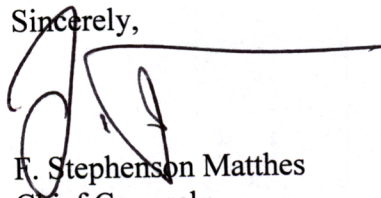
5. The information in this document is for informational purposes only and should not be used as a basis for any investment decision.

6. The information in this document is for informational purposes only and should not be used as a basis for any investment decision.

7. The information in this document is for informational purposes only and should not be used as a basis for any investment decision.

- H. The Open Records Officer shall comply with the decision of the Appeals Officer or, within 30 days of the date of the final agency decision, file a Petition for Review of the decision to Commonwealth Court.
- I. To the extent that the decision sustains the denial of the records request, the requestor may, within 30 days of the mailing date of the final agency decision, file a Petition for Review to the Commonwealth Court.

Sincerely,

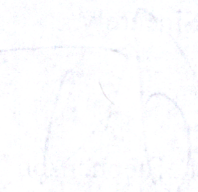
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'F. Matthes', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

F. Stephenson Matthes
Chief Counsel
OPEN RECORDS OFFICER

FSM/pjl

The Board of Directors of the company, which is a public company, has approved the following resolution:

Resolved, that the company shall, subject to the approval of the Board of Directors, enter into a contract with the following person or persons:



[Illegible text]
[Illegible text]
[Illegible text]

From: Auditor-General-News
Sent: Monday, August 12, 2019 11:48 AM
To: Auditor-General-News
Subject: Today's News Clips
Attachments: 08.12.2019.docx

Hannah Michael
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Department of the Auditor General

NEWS Clips

Monday, August 12, 2019

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Part 1: PA improves rape kit testing backlog, still more work to be done

CBS21

Amanda Hoskins/August 9, 2019

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines rape as an unlawful sexual activity carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against a person's will.

It calls it an outrageous violation.

But, still, many victims don't report rape to law enforcement agencies. Many victims never get the justice they deserve.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in five women experienced completed or attempted rape during her lifetime.

It says three out of four sexual assaults go unreported.

Kristen Houser sits inside her Pennsylvania office, still uneasy about how victims are treated. She serves as spokesperson for the PA Coalition Against Rape (PCAR), as well as the spokesperson for the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC).

While NSVRC has offices across the country, its headquarters are in Harrisburg, along with a library of data, research, and people with stories to be told.

But why don't victims report their assaults?

"Most people don't report because they don't trust others will respond appropriately," Houser explained.

She said victims have a lot of fears, ranging from mistrust with law enforcement, to fears about how friends and family will respond.

"It's fear about the way gossip moves in a community," Houser said. "It's fear about retribution from who the perpetrator is or who the perpetrator's friends are. It's fear about how social media can be used to bully somebody who does come forward."

Nationwide, Houser said biases, past practices, and rape kit backlogs have been brought to the public's attention. With small steps, she said some changes are being made in the commonwealth.

It starts with the testing of rape kits; a forensic search for evidence that sexual activity took place.

Inside Pennsylvania State Police Forensic Crime Labs, rape kit testing has increased significantly over the past few years.

"We get roughly 1,000 to 1,100 sexual assaults a year, so we have a little over 500 that have been submitted in the last six months," PSP's director of Scientific Services Division, Bureau for Forensic Services, Deborah Calhoun, said.

In 2015, an amended law required quicker testing of the kits, but in 2016, Auditor General Eugene DePasquale found 3,217 rape kits had not been tested; some, dating back decades.

Many were sitting in police departments, and had not been sent for testing.

Since then, DePasquale has worked tirelessly to ensure changes are made.

"It wasn't necessarily on their radar," Calhoun explained. "There are over 1,100 police departments across the commonwealth. Some of them are smaller departments and they do not often see rape cases, so it was challenging, making sure the entire law enforcement community, to include campus police, were educated on their requirements."

Now, police departments must report to the Department of Health annually about how many kits they have that are awaiting testing, how many have been waiting for more than 12 months, how many kits have victims not consented to testing and how many victims wished to remain anonymous.

At the end of 2018, 1,100 kits reported to the State Health Department had not been tested, 318 were still in the police department's possession and the rest were at the state's three crime labs.

CBS 21 requested information about how many kits departments across central Pennsylvania had that had still not been sent for testing.

The majority of departments responding said they had less than three that had not been sent to the crime lab for testing.

As for the crime lab, kits are constantly coming and going.

"We have a total of 297 sexual assault cases that have been untested that have been in our possession," Calhoun explained. "That is down 57 percent from an all-time high of our numbers back in 2016."

With more departments sending their kits, PSP's forensic lab needed to keep up.

They added 15 positions over the past few years. In the other crime labs, grants helped send untested kits to other facilities to be tested to recover from the large backlog of cases.

"We will continue to make improvements to our processes to try and become more efficient, but there will never ever be a zero backlog because we constantly have cases that are coming in our door daily," Calhoun said.

The number of untested kits is down, but Houser said the number of cases in police departments should still be fewer. She explained it is a small win, but there is more work to be done.

"We don't have good oversight to ensure that protocols are being followed, so that really needs to fall to leadership in jurisdictions to make sure their departments are following the law the way it was intended," Houser said.

In addition to the backlog, Governor Wolf has recently signed legislation to take effect next month, in an effort to ensure cases are being carried out.

Senate Bill 399 specifically designates PSP to develop a procedure to track rape kits. It also says a victim can request to be notified 60 days before their kit is destroyed.

"Pennsylvania is on the right track to get rid of the backlog we had, and we need to now look to other issues that are still within the same pipeline," Houser said.

She said the tracking system is a must, but governing the way evidence is destroyed is also important for victims.

TOP

Part 2: Testing rape kits inside crime labs

CBS 21

Amanda Hoskins/August 9, 2019

Inside Pennsylvania State Police's forensic crime labs, scientists are conducting a wide-array of tests.

On a daily basis, forensic serologists are testing samples for homicides, burglaries and aggravated assaults, as well as sexual assaults, just to name a few.

Sexual assaults are just one third of the total number of cases analyzed between the serology and DNA units of the crime lab, but they are prioritized.

Right now, it takes PSP an average of 130 days to test a kit. That accounts for the time the untested kit arrives at the crime lab to the time the submitting agency gets the results.

Carolyn Reilly is one of those forensic serologists with the PSP crime lab. She said she has seen an increase of the number of rape kits she is coming into contact with, monthly.

"If a kit has a couple items in it, it could take you a day," Reilly explained. "If it has a lot of items in it, it could take you a week."

She said, when she gets a kit, she begins by looking at the case information and what has come in the kit.

Reilly explained each kit has several envelopes in it, and the hospital staff will check off which sample is in each envelope.

She says she's in constant communication with the police department investigating the case.

"We don't have as much case information as they do, the case context and whatnot," Reilly said. "So, we try to meet their needs without testing every piece of evidence they bring to us if it's not completely necessary for the rest of their circumstances, because that's how we try to stay efficient."

Reilly explained sometimes police departments will already have enough evidence for certain aspects of the case, but, typically, she's starting with specific samples.

"We like to work from the most intimate samples outward," Reilly explained, pointing out different samples from an empty rape kit.

She said, from those samples, from various parts of the body, she can find sperm, blood or saliva.

"If we do get a positive indication of seminal material, we will process this slide and we would stain it so we can see the material that's on it, and then we are just doing a visual exam on a microscope, looking for sperm," Reilly said.

If she finds anything, it gets sent to the DNA lab; a step important for prosecution.

"For victims, it is so critical that we provide the service that these victims need to be able to see closure for their case and see justice is done, but, more importantly, if there is physical evidence that we are able to derive a genetic profile," PSP's director of Scientific Services Division, Bureau for Forensic Services, Deborah Calhoun, explained.

From there, police can upload the DNA to a nationwide database that allows investigators to link cases.

Victim advocates echo the importance of that aspect to testing the kit, even if a victim knows their perpetrator.

"Most people who are perpetrating sexual assaults, do it more than once," Kristen Houser, the spokesperson for PA Coalition Against Rape, said. "So, when you have somebody that is giving the community an opportunity to hold someone accountable for behaving this way, we as the community should be doing what we can to support that attempt, and I think we still fall short in a lot of ways, whether that's with evidence handling or how we treat victims and our willingness to believe them in the first place."

PSP's forensic crime lab is one of three that tests rape kits in Pennsylvania.

The labs in Philadelphia and Allegheny counties mostly test kits within their jurisdiction.

To learn more about how Pennsylvania is working to ensure victims get justice, and in an efficient manor, watch part one of this special report here.

[TOP](#)

Our View: Cheers to the weekend

Wilkes-Barre Times Leader

August 9, 2019

Diamonds to all the options you have this weekend and next, and all the people who work to make them happen. There is the Plymouth Kielbasa Festival, with the parade stepping off at 11 this morning, if you are reading this early enough.

Next weekend you can see the Pittston Tomato Festival Thursday through Sunday, or the distinctive Dragon Boat races (weather cooperating) on the Susquehanna River in Wilkes-Barre on Sunday, and the "Wings of Freedom Tour at the Hazleton Regional Airport off Airport Road. The last one is four World War II combat aircraft landing Monday around noon and on display through Wednesday. In fact, for an admittedly substantial sum you can fly in a P-40 or P-51 fight trainers or the legendary B-17 or B-24 bombers. For more information visit the website <https://www.collingsfoundation.org>. It all serves as a reminder of how much this area really has to offer.

Coal to the many factors behind the recent mass murders —let's stop downplaying the tragedies by referring to them as "shootings" when people die —in El Paso and Dayton, and coal to those who try to normalize such events by citing broader gun violence statistics in our major metropolitan areas. Yes, there are many gun deaths daily in many places, and those issues should be addressed, but these instances where one person takes mere minutes to snuff out as many lives as possible without even knowing who they shoot are and must always be utterly unacceptable. Local politicians were quick to call for action, and it is well past time to take some. Universal background checks seem to be a no-brainer, and some sort of carefully thought-out approach to the issue of mental health and gun ownership seems equally fundamental. We don't have to solve all the problems, and this is in no way a call for specific gun control measures. But we have to start trying new approaches to this terrifying and terroristic trend.

Diamonds to Auditor General Eugene DePasquale for taking an interest in the massive Wilkes-Barre Area School District consolidated high school project, to the school district officials who responded quickly (before DePasquale even issued his media release on the matter) with a promise of welcome cooperation, and to the citizens who filed complaints and concerns that prompted the probe. When an estimated \$121 million is being spent on a project that will fundamentally reshape public education in the district, it's hard to imagine having too many eyes scrutinizing the details. And it would be better to find problems now — or to prove there are no problems — than to start looking after the work is done. It's important, of course, for both sides to accept the conclusions of this third party review: The district by correcting any issues, the critics by accepting findings that may show the district has dotted all the i's and crossed all the t's.

TOP

Majority of Pennsylvanians want changes to how state funds towns without police departments

Pittsburgh City Paper

Ryan Deto/August 8, 2019

In Pennsylvania, about 1,300 communities don't have a police department, according to the Harrisburg radio station WITF. That is more than half of the municipalities in the state. In lieu of local police, Pennsylvania state troopers take care of these areas' policing needs.

But those communities don't pay extra for those services in the same way Pittsburgh local taxes cover the funds to pay for Pittsburgh Police. To cover the costs of the state troopers servicing local boroughs without police, the state is dipping into Pennsylvania's motor vehicle fund, which is meant to fund transit and infrastructure needs.

To cover the costs lost from the motor vehicle fund, Gov. Tom Wolf (D-York) has proposed charging towns without local police a per-resident fee. And according to a new poll from Franklin & Marshall College, Pennsylvanians support that or a similarly aligned effort.

The poll asked if the state should continue to siphon money from the motor vehicle fund to cover state police for towns without local police and 23 percent of Pennsylvanians said that should continue. A majority of 61 percent said communities without local police should reimburse the state for the coverage.

Wolf's proposal would make municipalities with fewer than 2,000 residents pay \$8 per person, with a sliding scale for towns with more all the way up to municipalities with more than 20,000 residents would pay \$166 per person. The governor's office has said his proposal would generate more than \$100 million.

In 2016, state legislators responded to the growing hole in the motor vehicle fund by passing a rule limiting PennDOT's allocation for state police.

Several municipalities in the Pittsburgh region don't have local police departments and rely on state troopers, the largest being Hempfield in Westmoreland County, which has 42,300 residents and would have to pay \$7 million under that proposal.

According to WITF, Republican leaders also seem open to some kind of mechanism to eliminate the gap in funding, but favor a funding model driven by how often residents request or use police services. Both these measures would take some pressure off of state police, which is suffering from its own financial hurdles and is apparently understaffed by 300 officers.

Support for finding another source of funding for state troopers also has bipartisan support, with 65 percent of Democrats and 64 percent of Republicans supporting. Respondents in Allegheny County also

supported the measure but only by a 46-42 percent margin. Respondents in Southwestern Pennsylvania counties not including Allegheny, support by 70-18 percent.

TOP

Under orders to replace voting machines, Pa. counties wonder when they'll see state money

Philadelphia Inquirer

Jonathan Lai/ August 12, 2019

As Pennsylvania county election officials replace the state's voting machines in advance of the 2020 election — at an estimated cost of \$150 million — they're anxious for an end to a dispute between Gov. Tom Wolf and Republican lawmakers that has tied up state funding and forced counties to shoulder most of the financial burden.

Wolf announced last month that he would seek \$90 million for the machines. However, that prompted the threat of a lawsuit by Republicans in the legislature, and the fate of the funding has become tied to partisan fights over the governor's authority and significant changes to the electoral system.

So 16 months after Wolf ordered the counties to replace the machines, the only funding available is \$14.1 million in mostly federal dollars. No new funding has been secured.

While Harrisburg bickers, county officials say they're forced to move forward anyway, hoping for reimbursement later.

"They tell us it's going to work, but we don't know that. And we've been promised a lot, but we still have yet to see it," said Forrest K. Lehman, elections director for Lycoming County.

"Counties are still operating on the assumption that we're paying for it on our own dime until we get details," he said. "Right now, we haven't heard anything otherwise, other than the governor's announcement, and it's been a rocky process."

The Pennsylvania Department of State expects all 67 counties to have new systems in place by the presidential primary election in April. A department spokesperson said this week that 41 counties have taken some form of official action toward choosing a new system and implementing. Those counties represent 5.25 million of the state's 8.49 million registered voters, or about three out of five.

Why state funding remains in question

Since Wolf's order last year, a primary question for counties has been where the money would come from.

Wolf originally proposed a five-year plan to provide \$75 million to the counties, which run elections. Republican lawmakers passed a bill that would have given counties \$90 million in state

funding — but it also would have eliminated the straight-party voting option that Democrats favor, along with other changes to the state's election system.

Wolf vetoed it and then announced that he would essentially do the same thing: issue \$90 million in bonds through the Pennsylvania Economic Development Financing Authority (PEDFA). Republicans immediately cried foul, saying the law doesn't allow him to do that unilaterally.

"If he believed he had those powers, he wouldn't have asked the General Assembly to provide that funding in the first place," said Mike Straub, spokesperson for the House Republicans.

A spokesperson for Wolf said the proposal will be presented to the PEDFA board at its Aug. 20 meeting and that the governor's office doesn't expect the board to act until next month at the earliest.

Straub emphasized that lawmakers do support the state funding — "we did not authorize that money disingenuously, we still believe it should happen" — and are open to negotiation with Wolf, likely as part of a broader package of changes to the electoral system.

Otherwise, he said, Republicans will sue to stop the governor.

"We certainly believe it would be illegal and there would be action on our part in terms of a lawsuit if he does go forward," he said. "As long as he comes back to the original way he asked for this to be done and we can authorize a bond ... there's really no need for a lawsuit here, as long as he goes the way he originally intended."

Where that leaves county election officials

"A pox on both their houses," Lehman, the Lycoming official, said of Republicans who added other pieces to the funding bill, and of Wolf for not ensuring state money for the counties. "Unfortunately, with election legislation, it can start as something administrative, innocuous, nonpartisan, and then you have this menu of some hot-button issues that tend to get people very animated on both sides. And if one of those gets entered in, suddenly that bill just becomes a political issue. And it didn't need to be."

With state funding in flux, counties are moving forward on their own. Nine counties, including Montgomery, used new systems in the primary election in May, and others, including Philadelphia and Chester, plan on using their machines for the first time in November. (Delaware and Bucks join the remaining counties in aiming for an April 2020 rollout.)

A lot of work remains even after counties select a system, including rewriting policies and procedures for Election Day, training elections staff and poll workers, and getting voters familiar with the new machines.

Presidential elections have the highest turnout, meaning an increased likelihood for something to go wrong. That's due to both the number of voters and the fact that a significant portion of them cast ballots only every four years and may be less familiar with the voting process.

"Training the public," said Tim Benyo, Lehigh County's election director, "is probably the biggest obstacle."

TOP

Armed police to be at all Plum School District buildings this coming school year

Pittsburgh Tribune Review

Michael Divittorio/August 9, 2019

Plum School District officials hired another retired New Kensington patrolman for its police force, and now can put an armed officer at every building this coming school year.

School board members voted 8-0 Tuesday, Aug. 6 to hire Michael Netzlof as an officer at the high school. School Director Jim Rogers was absent.

Netzlof was selected out of about six candidates. Pay rate was set at \$23.50 per hour.

Tim Hanna, district police supervisor and former McKeesport captain of detectives, said Netzlof's experience and attitude set him apart from the others.

"You interview the best you can, read people the best you can and you go with your best (option)," Hanna said. "I believe he was it. He has my full confidence moving forward."

Netzlof was a New Kensington patrolman from 1992 until retiring in January 2018. He also worked for four years at other police departments.

Netzlof was the tactical team commander for New Kensington/Lower Burrell critical response team from 2011 to 2018. He's also a martial arts instructor at CS Kim Karate.

"We're very happy to have him on board," board President Scott Coulson said. "His experience is going to be very beneficial for the district."

Netzlof still needs to be certified by Allegheny County courts, and be sworn in by Plum District Judge Linda Zucco before he becomes an official district officer.

Vicky Roessler, board vice president and safe and supportive schools committee chairwoman, was a catalyst for years in developing a safety coordinator position and the district police department. She said Netzlof's hiring and having a complete police force are examples of the many actions taken by the district to ensure student safety.

"This creates a foundation for safety that the district can continue to build upon," she said.

Other ex-New Ken officers on force

Netzlof will join fellow former New Kensington officers Joe Locke, Jim Horwatt and Craig Harnish, who worked for the district force last school year.

"I consider that department a very well-rounded department," Hanna said about New Kensington. "They've seen a large cross-section of society. It's a culturally diverse community, and that's important when you're hiring a police officer. That's the type of thing you want to know they've dealt with."

Retired state trooper Dwight Locke was hired with Horwatt as a district officer. Locke was the high school front desk's security guard for nine years prior.

Hanna said the plan is to have Joe Locke at Oblock Junior High, Harnish at Pivik Elementary, Horwatt at Holiday Park, Dwight Lock at Center Elementary and Netzlöf at the high school. The first day of school is Aug. 21.

Hanna, who doubled last year as police supervisor and high school officer, will focus more on administrative duties now that he has a full complement of officers.

The police presence was welcomed by many students, staff and parents last year.

Police interactions included giving presentations, a public service announcement contest, periodic visits to classrooms and going over activity books on stranger danger, fire safety and other situations.

"All the officers on the force so far have good relationships with students and staff," Hanna said. "When I started in October, the police department didn't exist. I think the district is in a good place with this.."

The district went through two safety and security assessments within the past two years.

Hanna said additional safety protocols and a lot of behind-the-scenes, research-based adjustments were made as a result besides hiring the officers.

The district had a school resource officer from the borough police department last school year.

Coulson said both parties are in negotiations to keep that program going.

TOP

From: Auditor-General-News
Sent: Wednesday, August 14, 2019 12:11 PM
To: Auditor-General-News
Subject: Today's News Clips
Attachments: 08.14.2019.docx

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Department of the Auditor General

NEWS Clips

Wednesday, August 14, 2019

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Allentown MORNING CALL—Paul Muschick: Why we should blow up Pennsylvania charter school system and start over

Wilkes-Barre Citizens' Voice—Crestwood official: No problem with bus drivers

Wilkes-Barre Citizens' Voice—Wilkes-Barre Area to cut 47 jobs, reduce costs with school consolidation plan

Pike County Courier—State police to draw less from highway fund, says PA Rep. Brown

Schools

Scranton Times-Tribune—Scranton School District may join legal fight for state funding

State police to draw less from highway fund, says PA Rep. Brown

Pike County Courier

AUG 13 2019

PA Rep. Rosemary Brown (R-East Stroudsburg) says she's received many complaints that needed work on roads and bridges has been compromised by diversions of funding to the Pennsylvania State Police.

In response, she said, the General Assembly has limited allocations from the Motor License Fund -- created to collect gas taxes and licensing fees to fund road work and highway safety -- to the state police to the amount transferred in 2016-17, or less. Amounts will be reduced each year until 2027-28, when the allocation will be limited to 60 percent of the amount appropriated in 2016-17.

"There is a tremendous amount of road work that needs to be accomplished in Monroe and Pike counties," she said. "However, we are moving forward. Please remember that Pennsylvania has the fourth largest roadway system in the country. With 40,000 miles of state roadways and 25,000 state-owned bridges -- the third largest number of bridges in the country -- the maintenance is constant, expensive and fierce."

She said some projects lost funding because extreme weather across Pennsylvania over the past year. Money from the Motor License Fund was used for flooding remediation, she said.

Lawmakers are working with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) to prioritize projects, she said. Any growth in the state police budget will be taken from the general fund, with money freed up from the Motor License Fund to be used for roads and bridges.

"It is very important to understand the Pennsylvania State Police has received funding from the Motor License Fund for more than 50 years because it is a traffic and safety enforcement agency on over 60 percent of all highway miles in Pennsylvania," Brown said.

Under the state Constitution, proceeds from the Motor License Fund are to be used solely for the construction, reconstruction, maintenance, and repair of and safety on public highways and bridges.

PA Auditor General Eugene DePasquale said in April that PennDOT could be much further along in repairing highways and bridges, were it not for the transfer of \$4.25 billion from the Motor License Fund to the state police since 2012-13.

"More than 2,800 state-maintained bridges across Pennsylvania are structurally deficient, and our bridges average over 50 years in age – beyond what they were designed to last," DePasquale said. "That \$4.25 billion could have cut that list in half, and if PennDOT could use all of the gas tax money for roads and bridges, we could get that number to zero in about 5 years."

DePasquale said 57.6 cents of state tax is added to each gallon of gas sold in Pennsylvania. That means \$5.76 in state tax is added to the cost of every 10 gallons put in the tank.

"Pennsylvanians are frustrated that our roads and bridges still need so much help at the same time we are paying the highest gas tax in the United States," he said.

In 2016, the Associated Pennsylvania Constructors, a trade association whose members include contractors, engineers, and suppliers, pointed out that the Motor License Fund supplied 65 percent of the state police budget that year.

"The state police performs a variety of other law enforcement services having nothing to do with patrolling highways," the association said in a press release. "We don't believe 65 percent of state police resources are devoted to patrolling highways, although no one knows definitively what that proportion might be."

The association noted that, to save money, nearly half of Pennsylvania's 2,561 municipalities have no police coverage other than from the state police.

Brown said that in the final 2019-20 state budget, lawmakers increased funding for the state police by \$62 million, or 20 percent, while decreasing the Motor License Fund portion by \$32 million, or 4 percent, compared to last year. The budget dedicates an additional \$9.7 million for three new Pennsylvania State Police cadet classes, she said.

Below is a list of roadwork in Pike County that PA Rep. Rosemary Brown's office has received inquiries on over the last several weeks:

Route 739: Multiple patching and roadwork currently occurring

State Route 2001: Betterment project and paving continuing on Section 2

Route 447: Patching at Pike County line

Route 191: Patching Sept.-Oct. 2019

"There is a tremendous amount of road work that needs to be accomplished in Monroe and Pike counties. The maintenance is constant, expensive and fierce." – PA Rep. Rosemary Brown

Wilkes-Barre Area to cut 47 jobs, reduce costs with school consolidation plan

Wilkes-Barre Citizens' Voice

Michael P. Buffer/August 4, 2019

The Wilkes-Barre Area School District plans to eliminate 47 jobs and reduce annual operating costs by nearly \$3.7 million after consolidating high schools, according to records provided to the state auditor general.

Annual personnel costs will decrease almost \$4.2 million, while annual transportation costs will increase \$504,000. The district is building a new high school to merge its three high schools — GAR, Meyers and Coughlin — when the 2021-22 school year begins and is consolidating sports programs this upcoming school year.

The district is building the new high school on a 77-acre former mining site between South Main and Maffett streets in Plains Twp. The project budget is \$121 million, and the overall annual cost of district debt payments is projected to increase \$3.5 million a year.

The district plans to eliminate jobs for 36 secondary teachers, one secondary administrator, four custodians, four secretaries, one home visitor and one guidance counselor. The district also plans to add one job for a school resource officer.

The district has responded to State Auditor General Eugene DePasquale request's for details of the consolidation plan and posted documents provided on the district website. On Aug. 1, DePasquale announced he asked the district for information in response to being contacted by more than 30 district residents who had "concerns about the district's consolidation and building project." DePasquale asked the district to provide copies of feasibility studies, appraisal documents, financial and debt-service plans, lists of vendors and details on project costs.

Critics of the consolidation formed a group called Save Our Schools, which wants to keep three high schools. SOS members claim smaller high schools are better for students and their families.

School officials have said the consolidation plan is more cost effective and provides all high school students with equal opportunities. Critics have also disputed assertions from school and state officials that the new high school will be on an environmentally safe reclamation site.

SOS members backed five school board candidates in the May primary election, and three of those five won party nominations to appear on the Nov. 5 general election ballot. Beth Anne Owens-Harris and Terry Schiowitz won Republican and Democratic nominations, and Robin Shudak won a Republican nomination.

School Board Vice President the Rev. Shawn Walker won a Democratic nomination. Incumbents Mark Atherton and John Quinn won Republican and Democratic nominations, while incumbent Dr. James Susek failed to win a nomination in the primary.

Crestwood official: No problem with bus drivers

Wilkes-Barre Citizens' Voice

JIM DINO/AUGUST 14, 2019

There is no problem with bus drivers in the Crestwood School District, the school board president and the bus company says.

Board president Bill Jones said Tuesday the district will have enough drivers when the 2019-2020 school term begins next month.

"We have a roster of 40 drivers, and we only need 20," Jones said. "There is no problem. Everyone is covered. We will have a board meeting Thursday night. We will tell people the bus routes and bus stops. It is going to be more efficient."

Social media postings had people concerned, including Jones, who went to the district office Tuesday afternoon to make sure.

"The people on social media were a little worried about the bus company, that they were subbing out their contract," Jones said. "I just spent an hour and a half making sure there was no problem. The Rinehimer contract is over, Davis is the contractor, they have the drivers and are ready to go. There is absolutely no problem."

Jones said the Davis Bus Co., Shohola, which agreed to a five-year contract in June to supply the district with bus service for the next five years, is advertising for drivers — but not because they need them.

"They certainly would like more drivers from Mountain Top, but they have enough," Jones said. "All this stuff on social media on the internet that we don't have enough drivers just isn't true. All it does is cause our taxpayers to have to pay more money for bus drivers because they don't want to come here because of all the problems."

Mary Rakowski, a spokeswoman for Davis Bus Co., said the company's search for bus drivers is ongoing.

"We are always looking for bus drivers," Rakowski said. "We have three school districts — Crestwood, Dallas and Wallenpaupack. We are still getting drivers. We are still taking applications. We have interviews set up for this week. We are looking for subs."

Rinehimer Bus Lines Inc., the former bus company serving the district, alleges improper termination and breach of contract in a lawsuit against the district and is seeking compensatory damages and equitable relief.

School board members said the new, five-year contract with Davis would save \$400,000 a year. The Rinehimer contract was supposed to run through 2021.

The termination came after state auditors in October found background clearances for some school bus drivers had expired and after the school board suspended and later terminated Superintendent Joseph Gorham and Director of Operations Christopher Gegaris.

The district used "its own violations" as a reason to terminate the Rinehimer contract, and the school board was motivated by getting a new transportation contract that "will be more economically desirable," Rinehimer alleges in the lawsuit.

School district solicitor Jack Dean said Rinehimer has admitted it failed to comply with its contract by not providing information on bus drivers to the district. He said he was confident "we'll be successful" defending the suit.

Auditor General Eugene DePasquale released an audit in May, and it found fault with school administrators, the bus company and the school board.

When auditors asked to see the criminal background checks and child abuse clearances for bus drivers, Crestwood officials said they didn't keep those records, and Rinehimer did not have copies of the required drivers' licenses for more than two-thirds of its 46 drivers, the audit said.

The audit found 41 of 46 records for bus drivers were incomplete. Files were missing for physical exams of 31 drivers, arrest and conviction reports of 22 drivers, federal criminal histories of 10 drivers and child abuse clearances of nine drivers.

The missing records led Crestwood to cancel class for two days until the records were completed.

Paul Muschick: Why we should blow up Pennsylvania charter school system and start over

Allentown MORNING CALL

AUG 14, 2019

The proposal from Gov. Tom Wolf on Tuesday to overhaul the state's charter school system is aggressive, welcome and long overdue.

The current system is unsustainable. School districts are paying too much money — \$1.8 billion statewide last year — and those figures are only going to increase. Allentown's costs have doubled to \$60 million, 20% of its budget, in just five years.

And that money is going to charter schools that are public schools in name only, in many ways.

They don't have the same level of accountability and transparency as school districts. It's hard to consider them truly public if they aren't held to the same standards, such as publicly bidding major expenses, releasing details of every dollar spent and answering to a local, publicly elected school board.

Wolf visited Allentown's Harrison-Morton Middle School. There, he called for preventing charters from over charging districts and taxpayers; for a moratorium on new cyber charter schools; and for charters to pay fees to the state for its costs to support them.

Those changes and others could save districts statewide millions of dollars, the governor said. The state budget office estimates the struggling Allentown School District could save more than \$10 million a year.

Officials did not provide details, though, of how those savings would be realized. Until regulations and legislation are enacted, this remains only a proposal.

Wolf's heart is in the right place. But I fear this may be just another example of him banging his head against the Republican wall in the Legislature, similar to his attempts to levy a severance tax on natural gas mining.

His administration can impose some changes on charter schools. But the biggest need — changing funding formulas — requires legislative action. And Republicans are the party of school choice.

Democratic Auditor General Eugene DePasquale has been calling for changes to the charter school law for years and the Legislature hasn't listened. Let's see if the governor has any more pull.

Some lawmakers, including some Republicans, agree changes need to be made.

Bills are pending in the Senate and House that would release districts from paying tuition for cyber charter students if the districts run their own cyber programs. Students who enroll in cyber charters would have to pay their own way.

After Wolf announced his plan Tuesday, Republican Sen. Pat Browne of Allentown, chair of the Appropriations Committee, called for a special legislation on charter school funding.

Those discussions should start with revising the faulty thinking of a student's per capita funding "following them" from their school district to a charter school.

It doesn't always cost charter schools, especially cyber charters, that much to educate the same student. And districts don't see an accompanying dollar-for-dollar reduction in their costs.

Unless an entire classroom of students at the same grade level moves to a charter, a district can't cut the expenses, including the teacher's salary, that go with that classroom. State officials need to come up with a better formula.

Cyber charters especially make out under that formula now. They collect the same tuition rate as traditional charter schools but have substantially lower costs. Taxpayers are overpaying more than \$250 million annually, according to a February study by Education Voters of

Pennsylvania, a project of the left-leaning Keystone Research Center.

Several studies have suggested a statewide tuition rate be set.

Wolf on Tuesday called for the Legislature to create a charter school funding commission.

But that shouldn't be necessary. There's already loads of research on this topic, including a 2017 analysis by the bipartisan Legislative Budget and Finance Committee and previous reviews by the state Department of Education, a legislatively required task force and the auditor general.

The Legislative Budget and Finance Committee recommended the Legislature allow school districts to negotiate per pupil payment rates with charter schools. It described the current formulas as "problematic."

I have a few suggestions in addition to Wolf's recommendations:

- * Reimburse districts for some charter tuition costs.

When they authorized charter schools in 1997, lawmakers recognized school districts would be penalized financially, so they reimbursed districts for up to 30% of their costs. That stopped in 2011.

Minimal reimbursements were restored in 2016 when the state revised its education funding formula. It covers only new spending, though, and is a "tiny fraction" of charter school costs, according to the Education Voters of Pennsylvania study.

- * Don't require school districts to pay tuition for private school students or home-schooled students who move to charter schools.

Districts can't include private and home-schooled students in their counts for state aid because they aren't enrolled, according to the Education Voters of Pennsylvania study. But once they move to a public charter school, districts are on the hook for their tuition. That's not right.

There is a place for charter schools. But if they are going to be publicly funded, they must operate under the same rules as traditional public schools, and be funded realistically.

The system must be changed to make that happen.

Scranton School District may join legal fight for state funding

Scranton Times-Tribune

KATHLEEN BOLUS/August 14, 2019

A lawsuit blaming the state for the financial struggles of many Pennsylvania school districts, set to go to court next summer, could affect the Scranton School District.

Meanwhile, district officials and citizens are considering filing their own lawsuit against the state.

The school funding lawsuit was filed on behalf of the Wilkes-Barre Area School District in Luzerne County; William Penn School District in Delaware County; Panther Valley School District in Carbon County; the School District of Lancaster in Lancaster County; Greater Johnstown School District in Cambria County; and the Shenandoah Valley School District in Schuylkill County; as well as seven parents from across the state, the Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools and the NAACP-Pennsylvania State Conference.

The suit alleges the state Department of Education and several state officials named as defendants violated the education and the equal protection clauses of the state constitution by not adequately funding the state's 500 school districts. It also claims the state "adopted an irrational and inequitable school financing arrangement" that drastically underfunds districts across the state and discriminates against children on the basis of where they live.

Other defendants named in the lawsuit include state Senate President Pro Tempore Joseph B. Scarnati III, R-25, Jefferson; former state House of Representatives Speaker Samuel H. Smith, a Jefferson County Republican, and former Gov. Tom Corbett.

Local attorney Frank Tunis Jr. mentioned the lawsuit Monday during an organizational meeting of community members interested in helping fight for fairer funding for the Scranton School District.

He has reached out to Michael Churchill, an attorney working on the lawsuit, to add Scranton to the list of districts involved in the lawsuit. Tunis said he's expecting to hear back by the end of the week.

If Scranton cannot join the suit, Tunis thinks the district should file its own lawsuit and ask the courts to pause implementing the recovery plan until the lawsuit is settled.

The state put the Scranton School District in recovery status in February. State-appointed financial recovery officer Candis Finan, Ed.D., released a plan July 25 to bring the district into financial solvency. The five-year plan — which can be amended — calls for property tax increases each year of the plan and suggests closing elementary schools and reconfiguring intermediate schools. The plan does not address state funding.

"Once you lay off teachers, once you raise taxes, once you close buildings, you can't unring that bell," said Tunis, whose children attend West Scranton High School.

The school funding lawsuit — filed in November 2014 by Public Interest Law Center and Education Law Center, both based in Philadelphia — went through the appeals process and was thrown out of court, Tunis said. The state Supreme Court reversed that decision and reinstated the lawsuit.

Both parties are now working through the discovery process, which is expected to be completed by Oct. 4. They are scheduled to go to court in 2020. Pennsylvania Appeals Court Judge Renée Cohn Jubelirer will oversee the pretrial proceedings.

The lawsuit claims the six districts are "unable to provide students with the basic elements of an adequate education, such as appropriate class sizes, sufficient experienced and effective teachers, up-to-date books and technology, adequate course offerings, sufficient administrative staff, academic remediation, counseling and behavioral health services, and suitable facilities necessary to prepare students to meet state proficiency standards."

The Scranton School District struggles with similar issues. Scranton was placed in recovery by the state; the districts in the lawsuit were not.

In Scranton, a lack of funding and a large budget deficit prompted the district — then under state financial watch status — to lay off 16 teachers in August 2018. The district eliminated all librarian positions.

The recovery plan calls for updating outdated books and technology in the district. Scranton's administrative staff is small for the district's size and student count; grants often fund counseling and behavioral health services. As for facilities, the recovery plan states that Scranton needs \$55.6 million immediately to update its failing infrastructure.

Scranton School District's five-year recovery plan calls for property tax increases every year. The district's preliminary budget, passed Aug. 6, includes a tax increase of 6.7% and a \$1.7 million deficit.

Scranton, whose per-pupil funding is significantly less than other urban districts of the same size, gets 41.6% of its budget from local revenue sources including property, wage and business privilege taxes. Board members estimate the district needs an additional \$18.9 million a year to receive the average per-pupil state allotment.

"What attorney Tunis said last night was great and I'm 100% behind it," said board Vice President Greg Popil.

He plans to vote against the recovery plan during a school board meeting Thursday because of the lack of state funding for Scranton.

"I think its completely unfair," Popil said. "It makes absolutely no sense. The state put us in this position and what the state wants us to do is to dig our way out of this hole by taxing the people they penalized."

After the plan was made public, Finan explained that addressing state funding is not her role. She has added that, should the district receive more state money, the recovery plan could be altered.

School Director Katie Gilmartin thinks the board needs to proceed with caution when thinking about legal action.

"I certainly agree with everyone that this is a very serious matter," she said. "But we need our solicitor's opinion. We have to make sure that we are measuring our actions very carefully."

Solicitor John Audi could not be reached for comment.

School Director Tom Borthwick said Scranton does not have the money to sue the state on its own but joining the lawsuit, which is pro-bono, is a "no brainer."

"We are getting killed and we stand to benefit if the lawsuit is successful," he said.

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From: Miller, Gary
Sent: Friday, August 16, 2019 10:04 AM
To: DePasquale, Eugene
Subject: FW: release: Gov. Wolf Takes Bold Action to Reduce Gun Violence

FYI.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 16, 2019
[View Online](#)

Gov. Wolf Takes Bold Action to Reduce Gun Violence

Harrisburg, PA – Today, Governor Tom Wolf signed an executive order making unprecedented sweeping changes to executive branch agencies and programs to better target the public health crisis of gun violence in Pennsylvania. He was joined by advocates, legislators, cabinet secretaries and Charles Ramsey, chair of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), who will use his expertise in a new role advising the executive branch on implementing these changes.

"Too many Pennsylvanians are dying from gun violence. We need to fix our weak gun laws and pass reforms focused on increasing safety and reducing danger to our citizens," Gov. Wolf said. "The action I am announcing today includes provisions for Pennsylvanians of all walks of life and looks at gun violence from all angles."

The governor's executive order names Ramsey as a senior advisor charged with coordinating and facilitating gun violence reduction. Ramsey will lead a new Office of Gun Violence Prevention within the PCCD, and the office will contain a Special Council on Gun Violence tasked with meeting within 60 days to begin developing a plan to reduce gun violence in our commonwealth.

The executive order also creates the Division of Violence Prevention within the Department of Health. The two new offices will work together to tackle gun violence from both the gun safety and public health perspectives. Together, they will establish new oversight and data sharing, reduce community gun violence, combat mass shootings, and halt domestic violence-related and self-inflicted shootings.

"I am honored to be asked by Governor Wolf to chair the Special Council on Gun Violence and serve as his senior advisor," PCCD Chairman Charles Ramsey said. "I look forward to developing recommendations to reduce and prevent gun violence – in all its forms – throughout Pennsylvania. The opportunity to explore gun violence in its totality is a unique challenge, but I am confident that the Council, the Office of Gun Violence Prevention at PCCD, and the Division of Violence Prevention at DOH will be up to that task."

More than 1,600 people died in Pennsylvania from gunshot wounds in 2017, a rate above the national average. While all types of violence must be addressed, guns account for the weapon used in 74 percent of all homicides and 52 percent of fatal suicides in Pennsylvania. The spikes in gun violence have led to billions of taxpayer dollars going toward efforts to increase security in schools and other public places and provide medical care to survivors, while families and communities have suffered invaluable losses when loved ones die of senseless gun violence.

Gov. Wolf recognizes that executive action alone cannot end gun violence in Pennsylvania. In addition to his call for a federal assault weapons ban, he will also call upon the General Assembly to pass safe storage

legislation to reduce the number of accidental shootings, the Extreme Risk Protection Order Act, also known as the red flag law, lost and stolen gun reporting, and universal background checks by the Pennsylvania State Police on all gun purchases.

Governor Wolf's Executive Order will immediately implement the following:

Special Council on Gun Violence

- Housed at the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), the Special Council on Gun Violence will consist of representatives from the following:
 - One representative from each of PCCD's existing advisory committees, including the Children's Advocacy Center Advisory Committee, Criminal Justice Advisory Committee, the Mental Health and Justice Advisory Committee, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee, the Victims' Services Advisory Committee, the School Safety and Security Committee, and the Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs Education and Training Board;
 - One representative from each of the four legislative caucuses of the General Assembly or their designees;
 - The Secretaries of Education, Health, and Human Services, the State Police Commissioner, the Executive Director of PCCD, and the Director of the Office of Homeland Security;
 - Any other ex-officio member as designated by the Governor.
- The Council will meet within 60 days of the signing of the Executive Order and will be responsible for the following:
 - Adopting a public health and community engagement strategy that includes gun owners, health care professionals, and victims of gun-related incidents,
 - Reviewing current background check processes for firearms purchasers and making recommendations for improvement,
 - Reviewing best practices and making recommendations that keep weapons from dangerous individuals,
 - Identifying and defining strategies across Commonwealth agencies to align resources to reduce gun violence, and
 - Providing PCCD and the Senior Advisor with recommendations to reduce incidents of community violence, mass shootings, and domestic violence, suicide, and accidental shootings within 180 days of the initial meeting of the Council.

New Oversight and Data Sharing

- Establish the Office of Gun Violence Prevention within PCCD and the Division of Violence Prevention within the Department of Health's Bureau of Health Promotion and Risk Reduction. Together, the offices will tackle gun violence and prevention from both the public safety and public health perspectives.
 - Charles Ramsey, Chair of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, will serve as senior advisor to the Governor, leading the commonwealth's efforts on gun reform.
 - Charge the Office of Gun Violence Prevention with coordinating a system of focused police deterrence in neighborhoods and cities where violence is most extreme; work with other Commonwealth agencies and stakeholders on community gun violence prevention; and lost and stolen firearms reporting requirements for law enforcement.
 - PCCD will staff the new Special Council on Gun Violence, which will meet within 60 days of the executive order signing to begin developing a comprehensive plan to reduce gun violence.
- Direct all departments to engage in a statewide effort at combatting the systemic causes of violence, namely poverty, economic opportunities, mental and behavioral health supports, and hopelessness.
- Establish a Violence Data Dashboard to provide a better understanding of the scope, frequency, geography, and populations affected by violence, including counts, rates, and factors contributing to violence.

Reducing Community Gun Violence

- Expand and support gun buyback programs through the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) and municipal police departments.
- Direct PSP and the Municipal Police Officers' Education and Training Commission (MPOETC) to develop training on community gun violence prevention and focused deterrence.
- Increase data sharing among jurisdictions to ensure broad geographical data is represented and tracked at the state level.
- Partner with the courts to grow awareness and utilization of evidence-based juvenile justice programs that are proven to reduce violent crimes.
- Expand Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS), a proactive approach to improving school safety and promoting positive behavior, in schools statewide.

Combatting Mass Shootings

- Charge PSP with expanding their monitoring of hate groups, white nationalists, and other fringe organizations and individuals, and conducting investigations, online and in communities, related to any threats of violence by these groups or individuals.
- Expand the "See Something/Send Something" program to receive reports of suspicions of mass shootings by text and use a campaign to raise awareness of the ability to contact police by text.
- Coordinate PSP and MPOTEC with local first responders to develop training on how to facilitate and handle warnings of suspicions of potential mass shootings.
 - PSP and PA Capitol Police will coordinate with agency secretaries to offer active shooter/incident management training to all employees, not just management.
- Enroll Pennsylvania in the "States for Gun Safety" coalition, a multistate partnership charged with combatting the gun violence by sharing information and establishing the nation's first regional Gun Violence Research Consortium.
- Direct the Office of Homeland Security to launch an awareness campaign regarding the local, state, and federal resources on safety planning and preparedness.

Halting Domestic Violence-Related and Self-Inflicted Shootings

- Direct the Suicide Prevention Task Force to make immediate recommendations on steps to reduce suicides by gun.
- Build on current Mental Health Stigma campaigns that provide families and communities with real stories and statistics as well as information about how to access resources.
- Develop a multidisciplinary Suicide Death Review Team to increase data collection and inform preventions efforts and policy decisions.
- Increase awareness of and strengthen services within the Student Assistance Program, which allow school districts to provide mental health referrals, across the commonwealth by providing technical assistance.

The executive action taken today will provide greater protection for all Pennsylvanians by targeting various types of gun violence with both preventative and proactive programs. Gov. Wolf recognizes the Second Amendment but believes all Americans and Pennsylvanians have the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that also must be protected.

"It is my honor and my duty to guide our commonwealth to a place where residents are not dying from gun violence while also upholding rights," Gov. Wolf said. "By finding the right middle ground, we can create the best Pennsylvania; one of freedom without fear. The conversation of where this middle ground lays is ongoing, and I look forward to continuing it with the legislature as we move into the start of the fall session."

View the [full executive order](#).

MEDIA CONTACT: J.J. Abbott, 717-783-1116

From: Auditor-General-News
Sent: Monday, August 19, 2019 1:12 PM
To: Auditor-General-News
Subject: Today's News Clips
Attachments: 08.19.2019.docx

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Department of the Auditor General

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Matchock responds to findings in state Auditor General's report

The Progress News

By Dianne Byers /Aug 17, 2019

Curwensville Area School District Superintendent Ron Matchock responded to a audit report recently released by the state auditor general.

Auditor General Eugene DePasquale noted his department examines the records of school districts, charter schools, vocational-technical schools and intermediate units throughout the commonwealth. Curwensville's review covered July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2017.

DePasquale said while Curwensville Area School District implemented policies and procedures for internal controls, budgetary practices, right-to-know and Sunshine laws and complied, in all significant respects, with relevant requirements, except for the following: the district failed to conduct all required monthly fire drills and inaccurately reported fire drill data to the state Department of Education.

"The district did complete nine fire drills during each school year," Matchock said in an interview Friday. "The audit finding result addresses counting and reporting fire drills that were not preplanned and were accidental pulls of the alarm. The district also counted and reported fire drills that occurred when the entire student body was not present outside of a standard school day."

He said the district has prepared a corrective action plan to address the findings.

"The corrections are pretty straight forward in that going forward, any accidental alarm pulls will not be counted in the reported drills," Matchock said.

Elizabeth Forward officials: Bus provider breached contract; student transportation in jeopardy

Pittsburgh Tribune Review

Emily Balser/August 15, 2019

Officials with the Elizabeth Forward School District have filed an injunction against Pennsylvania Coach Lines after, the district claims, the bus company breached their contract and are jeopardizing the transportation for thousands of students when school starts next week.

The district said in a press release that it filed a lawsuit with the of Allegheny County Court against Pennsylvania Coach Lines, also known as PA Coach, to enforce its contract rights.

Officials said in the release that PA Coach notified Elizabeth Forward on Aug. 2 that it will not honor the contract approved by the school board last October and will not transport any Elizabeth Forward students.

According to meeting and voting documents on the district's website, the school board approved a new contract extending the end date of the transportation agreement with Pennsylvania Coach Lines to June 30, 2023. The agreement was approved Nov. 19, 2008 with an end date of June 30, 2019.

Attempts to contact PA Coach were unsuccessful late Thursday.

The district claims PA Coach hasn't provided a legitimate explanation for its decision and, if left unchallenged, would result in nearly 2,350 students without district-provided transportation at the start of the school year.

"Over the past two weeks, EFSD has tried unsuccessfully to resolve this matter amicably with PA Coach and avoid litigation," said Todd Keruskin, superintendent, in the press release. "The result of PA Coach's action is that thousands of students, including several hundred special needs children, may not have adequate transportation to school which starts Thursday, August 22."

The district is seeking preliminary and permanent injunctive relief, requiring PA Coach to comply with its contractual obligations and transport students in accordance with the contract.

Keruskin said in the release that because the district is 42 square miles, providing bus transportation "is essential" to getting students to school.

The district serves the Elizabeth Borough and Forward and Elizabeth townships in the southernmost region of Allegheny County.

The district will be using its electronic communications system to notify parents and guardians via phone, text and email. The district will also provide updates on its website and social media accounts.

Notification will be posted on the district's website www.efsd.net, it's Facebook page and Keruskin's Twitter account.

Cheyney balances budget and raises \$4.4 million, both key to keeping it afloat

Philadelphia Inquirer

Susan Snyder/Aug. 16, 2019

For the first time in eight years, Cheyney University has ended the fiscal year with not only a balanced budget, but a surplus, which could help the long embattled state school retain its accreditation, officials announced Friday.

The university brought in \$4.4 million in its alumni-led "Resurgence" campaign and other fund-raising efforts that helped Cheyney end the year with a \$2.1 million surplus, the university said. Cheyney's budget is \$26 million.

Cheyney president Aaron A. Walton said the money came from a mix of sources including alumni, faculty, staff and businesses.

But the biggest chunk, \$2.5 million, came in the form of an "unrestricted grant" from the state, specifically the Pennsylvania Department of Education, that was targeted to support the campaign and Walton's turnaround efforts, he said. The university noted the receipt of the state grant in a monitoring report it had to turn in to its accrediting agency this week, he said.

The state also earlier this year boosted funding to Cheyney for scholarships to its honors program.

"Gov. Wolf has been extremely supportive," Walton said. "We couldn't have asked for a greater level of support and encouragement."

The governor's office was not available for immediate comment.

Cheyney's budget hasn't yet been reviewed by the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, of which Cheyney is a part.

"All state system universities are required to submit their 2018-19 financial reports for independent audit before any definitive declaration can be made about a university's fiscal health," system spokesperson David Pidgeon said in a statement. "While we are encouraged by the progress Cheyney University has made, we acknowledge there are steep challenges ahead."

The budget news comes at a particularly important time for Cheyney, which this month had to submit a progress report to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, the body that will decide in November whether Cheyney can keep its accreditation. The school has received two one-year extensions from the commission to fix its finances, and there is no mechanism to provide a third.

Walton said he remains "cautiously optimistic" that the university will meet Middle States' requirements.

"We are trying to dig ourselves out of years of negative performance, and you don't do that overnight," said Walton, a retired executive who took over more than two years ago. "We are certainly pleased with the progress that has been made in the last two years. But we have much to do to make

sure the university is on a firm financial academic footing for years to come. We are working toward that."

Founded in 1837, Cheyney, which sits on 275 acres in Delaware and Chester Counties, has a storied history as the nation's oldest historically black college but has struggled in recent years and has lost two thirds of its enrollment since 2007. The university's enrollment had dropped to just 469 students last fall.

In February, Daniel Greenstein, chancellor of the state system, said the university was experiencing a \$10 million cash flow problem and was highly likely to lose its accreditation in November and should begin planning for that.

But after a meeting with Gov. Wolf, system officials said they would continue to support Cheyney's turnaround efforts under Walton. The university last summer announced plans to partner with Thomas Jefferson University, Starbucks, and others in creating an African American-focused institute that would promote the school's legacy.

Walton said those plans and more are in the works at Cheyney. This summer, the university held a "Summer Bridge" program on campus for incoming freshmen who had a 3.0 GPA but whose college board scores were lower than the university wanted. The 29 students took two classes and were required to get a B average for admission this fall, he said. All students met the mark.

The university also is getting help from Presidential Partners, Inc., a New York firm that includes former college presidents who provide guidance on curriculum and academics, Walton said.

Cheyney expects to welcome 215 freshmen to campus next week, compared to less than 100 last year, Walton said. The university anticipates overall enrollment to exceed 600, he said.

An encouraging sign, Walton said, is the school's anticipated freshman to sophomore retention rate. The university expects that 72 percent of freshmen from fall 2018 will return, which would be the highest rate in 25 years, Walton said.

The university plans to continue its fund-raising campaign with the goal of bringing in another \$5.6 million more by next summer, he said. Though the university had a surplus on the books, it still struggles with cash flow because the U.S. Department of Education placed the university on "heightened cash monitoring" after it found in 2015 that the school had mismanaged millions in financial aid. That means it takes longer for the university to receive reimbursement for students who get federal financial aid.

Cheyney also owes the state system money, but the system has agreed to forgive that debt if the university balances its budget for three years.

"There is a lot of work to be done," Walton said, "but we are encouraged."

PennDOT didn't send savings from registration stickers to law enforcement: Here's why

Patriot News

Bennett Leckrone/Aug 16, 2019

PennDOT officials said in 2016 that the department might use the savings from eliminating license plate stickers to fund expensive cameras for police departments.

That never happened.

Kurt Myers, the deputy secretary of driver and vehicle services at PennDOT, baffled lawmakers at a Pennsylvania House Transportation Committee meeting on Aug. 13 when he revealed that the \$7.1 million to date in savings was already sent to other programs.

When PennDOT eliminated license plate registration stickers a few years ago, officials said they wanted to use the savings for automated license plate readers – specialized cameras that collect and store data about license plates.

Myers later said that while PennDOT did want to set up a grant program for the cameras, it would've required a separate bill.

"Legislation is necessary to establish such a program, and no legislation to that effect was ever introduced," Myers said.

He said PennDOT had offered upwards of \$12 million in estimated savings from eliminating stickers to fund the automated license plate reader cameras over a period of five years. Conversations between PennDOT and the legislature broke down, and lawmakers decided to not move forward with the project, Myers said.

Some lawmakers at the meeting, including Rep. Martina White, R-Philadelphia County, and Rep. Doyle Heffley, R-Cumberland County, assumed PennDOT was already funding the cameras.

"It sounds as though there was a breakdown in communication," White said.

White asked if future legislation could include language about a grant program, but Myers said the money has already been allocated to other areas.

"The money's not there," Myers said. "The money would have to be found."

The automated license plate readers, or ALPRs, can cost \$18,000 per vehicle. Heffley said many local police departments are strapped for cash or even disbanding around the state and might not be able to afford the expensive equipment on their own.

Lawmakers are currently mulling a bill that would regulate the use of ALPRs across the state, including controlling who can access the data they collect. Some law enforcement agencies are currently using the systems but the new bill would create a statewide database for law enforcement to share information.

PennDOT's decision to eliminate registration stickers has been a headache for law enforcement, Rep. Barry Jozwiak, R-Berks County, said. He's introduced a bill that bring stickers back to Pennsylvania license plates in the form of a combined registration and inspection sticker.

Various law enforcement groups, including the Pennsylvania Fraternal Order of Police, Pennsylvania State Troopers Association, Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association and the Pennsylvania Auto Theft Prevention Authority all support the legislation. They say their members have struggled without the stickers.

Representatives from the Pennsylvania State Police who attended the meeting, however, said that the computers in their vehicles are more efficient and accurate than relying on a sticker.

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